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## ABSTRACT

This research study: (1) looks at what happens in social studies classrooms; and (2) attempts to determine the characteristics and behaviors of effective teachers. To collect data, the researcher observed several high school (grades 9-12) social studies classes since the fall semester of 1991 in the San Francisco (California) Bay Area for 3 months and in five other countries (Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Poland, and Korea). In addition, teachers and students answered questionnaires and were interviewed. Teachers were asked about their expectations for students, what good or effective teaching is, how they characterized today's students, and whether or not they treat honors classes differently than they treat non-honors classes. Students were asked whether or not they liked social studies, and to define good and poor social studies teachers. Tests, lesson plans, teacher's notes, and student notebooks and assignments were examined. The study found that effective teachers behave similarly and share certain characteristics. They tend to maintain high expectations for their students, are able to explain things clearly to their students, and vary their teaching methods and classroom activities. The study also showed that effective teachers saw their courses as having an impact on their students' lives, and were concerned with not only course contents, but also with student learning processes. Tables throughout the paper describe types of research activities, compare classroom activities of effective teachers to those of ineffective teachers, show evidence of student learning, compare how frequently various classroom activities occurred in United States and overseas schools, list student ratings of classroom activities, and list characteristics and behaviors of effective social studies teachers. (LP)

## CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIORS OF EFFECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES<sup>1</sup>

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In what ways do effective<sup>2</sup> teachers differ from those who are ineffective? Do they possess certain characteristics that ineffective teachers do not? Do they actually teach differently than their less effective counterparts, that is, do they employ *different* kinds of activities and behave differently with students or do they simply do what they do *better*? These questions have interested me ever since I taught high school social studies back in the late 1960s. At that time, I thought that the *kind* of students or *subject* a person taught would be a determining factor in how he or she taught--that is, that teachers of one kind of subject (e.g., economics or cultural geography) or a particular kind of student (e.g., a class of the academically gifted) would teach their subject and students differently than those who taught a different kind of subject and/or student. And that this would be true regardless of teaching ability.

I no longer believe this to be the case. Effective teachers appear to behave and teach in remarkably similar ways, *regardless* of where, what, or who they teach. In this article, I wish to report on some of the research I have been doing in the last few years that I think bears out this conclusion.

Since the fall semester of 1991, I have begun to document and describe the behaviors and activities of students and teachers in several social studies classrooms in five schools in a large urban school district on the west coast of the United States.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a considerably expanded version of one presented at the Triannual Network Conference, Network Educational Science Amsterdam (NESA), in Budapest, Hungary, September, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Effective teachers are those for whom there is evidence that students are not only learning, but also express an interest in the material they are taught. Such evidence includes such things as paying attention in class, completing homework assignments accurately and on time, attending class regularly, participating intelligently in class discussions, passing examinations with satisfactory marks, and so forth. Evidence in this regard is presented later in the paper.

I have also made similar observations in classrooms in selected cities in Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Poland, and Korea. What I observed in these other countries has served to corroborate what I observed in schools in the United States and has served to reinforce my conclusions. In this paper, I shall present a summary of my data; describe the conclusions I have (tentatively) reached; and describe the methodology I have employed.

### Methodology

Each semester, using a variety of methods and instruments to collect my data,<sup>3</sup> I have observed at least four classes<sup>4</sup> twice per week over for three-months in at least two different high schools (grades 9-12) in the San Francisco Bay Area,<sup>5</sup> and interviewed the teachers, plus a sample of students, in these classes. In addition, I have been able to observe a number of classes in schools in Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Poland, and Korea.<sup>6</sup> The high schools in which I observed differ in some respects, but these differences in the main have little to do (at least directly) with what goes on in classrooms. My intent was and continues to be twofold:

- (a) to gain as accurate and detailed an impression as possible of what happens on a more or less regular basis in social studies classrooms; and

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<sup>3</sup>I have been keeping a daily log in which I record the comments and describe the behaviors of both students and teachers. When appropriate, I also have prepared flow-charts of student-teacher and/or student-student comments; time and motion logs of student behaviors; tally sheets of the kinds of questions students ask and answer; sociograms of power relationships that exist; and/or rating scales on which students rate different teacher activities). I also am administering an end-of-semester questionnaire to all students in which I ask them to indicate whether or not various activities occur in their classroom (e.g., weekly discussions of current events), and, if they do, how often they occur and to rate the quality of those which occur frequently.

<sup>4</sup>I have observed at least one 9th grade geography, 10th grade World Civilizations, 11th grade U.S. History, and/or 12th grade government or economics class each year. Most of the classes observed have been U. S. History classes, however, simply because more of them exist.

<sup>5</sup>The work reported here is but a part of a larger body of ongoing research. Some of this research has been previously reported. See J. R. Fraenkel. (1994). A portrait of four social studies teachers and their classes: With special attention paid to identification of teaching techniques and behaviors that contribute to student learning. Dennis S. Tierney (Ed.). 1994 *Yearbook of California Education Research*. San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press, pp. 89-116.

<sup>6</sup>To date, I have observed a total of 24 classes in the United States, and a total of 40 classes in the overseas schools.

(b) to document how effective and non-effective teachers in these classrooms differ.

As a follow-up to end-of-semester questionnaires that I administered, I conducted in-depth interviews<sup>7</sup> with each teacher, as well as with a randomly selected sample of students from each class observed. During these interviews, I encouraged both students and teachers to talk at length about what they thought was happening in their classrooms and what they liked and disliked. I also asked them the following questions:

For teachers:

- What expectations do you have for your students?
- What, for you, constitutes good or effective teaching?
- What, for you, constitutes poor or ineffective teaching?
- Do you teach the students in honors classes any differently than you do students in non honors classes? If so, how?
- How would you characterize today's students?
- How do you feel about teaching after all these years?

For students:

- Do you like social studies? Why or why not?
- How would you define a good social studies teacher?
- How would you define a poor social studies teacher?
- Would you like to be a social studies teacher yourself? Why or why not?

In summary, therefore, in all six countries:

- Both teachers and students in all six countries were observed to identify the teachers' style of teaching; to record the sorts of comments the teachers made to students (and vice-versa), and the remarks that occurred among students; and to chart the nature and frequency of various classroom activities. All observation periods were approximately 45 minutes in length and comprised the entire class.
- All teachers were interviewed at length (for approximately one hour) about their philosophy of teaching; the expectations they had for their students; their teaching style; the image they had of themselves as a teacher; how they thought they

<sup>7</sup> Each interview was tape recorded and lasted for approximately one hour.

were perceived by students; the image they had of students, and what they would change about themselves if they were able to do so.

•A random sample of students were interviewed to determine the perceptions of their teacher; what they believed their teacher did well; their perception of the teacher's shortcomings; what they liked and disliked about their social studies class, and why, and whether or not they themselves would ever want to be a social studies teacher. The purpose of the interviews was not only to allow students and teachers to describe the teacher's style, but also to check my perceptions of what I observed the teachers doing against their own and their students' perceptions of what was happening in class.

•Documents (lesson plans, tests, teacher's notes, student notebooks, written assignments, products such as maps, etc.) were examined to assess the relationship or lack thereof between the teacher's assignments and his or her lesson and course objectives.

The number of classes and the research activities employed in each country are shown in Table One. Although the sample of classes I observed to date has been relatively small, it includes students and teachers from six different countries with similar results being observed in each country. Accordingly, I have formed some tentative conclusions about what constitutes effective social studies teaching at the high school level, and what effective social studies teachers do that ineffective ones do not. I shall describe some of these differences later in the paper.

#### Similarities and Differences

*The U. S. Schools.* All of the U. S. schools are situated on the outskirts of large cities (i.e., they are city schools, but they are not located downtown). All have fairly large student bodies (total n's range from approximately 1500 to almost 2000).

**TABLE ONE**  
**TYPES OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**  
(n=number of classes)

Research Activity	United States n=24	Australia n=12	New Zealand n=8	Germany n=10	Poland n=4	Korea n=6
Observation of classes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
In-depth interviews with teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
In-depth interviews with students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tally sheets kept of classroom discussions	✓	✓		✓		
Perusal of teachers' lesson plans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Perusal of quizzes and tests	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Daily log kept by researcher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Written questionnaires given to students	✓	✓	✓			
Rating scales given to students	✓	✓	✓			
Informal discussions with teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

All contain students in all four of the grades 9-12, each has a freshman, sophomore, junior and senior class. All schools have identical requirements for graduation: four years of English; two years of a lab science; two years of mathematics; two years of physical education, one year of the visual or performing arts, one year of a foreign language, and three years of social studies.

The social studies requirement in the U. S. schools is identical (a year of world civilizations; a year of U. S. history; a semester of American government; and a semester of economics). All five schools offer a wide variety of elective courses that

students can take. All possess a core of experienced teachers who have been teaching on the average for 20 years or more.

The composition of the social studies classes in these schools also is similar in several respects. The average class size is somewhere between 30 and 35 students per class. The teachers are predominantly (approximately 75%) male, older (the average age is 45 years), and have been teaching for some time.<sup>8</sup> All are experienced professionals. The size, layout, and contents of the rooms where instruction is given are essentially the same. The intra-school average GPAs of the students is very similar, although the inter-school average GPA of the students differs considerably.

Classes in the five schools do differ, however. They are heterogeneous (the students are of mixed ability). The average GPA of the students in the classes varies by as much as one full point (the average GPA of one class, for example, was 3.5, while the average GPA of a similar class in another school was 2.8). The gender and ethnic composition of the students varies in different classes, as does the age, ethnicity, gender, and style of the teachers. The classes meet at different times during the day. The teachers have different instructional objectives, use different textbooks, have different sorts and amounts of supplementary materials available, give different types and amounts of homework, engage students in different kinds of activities, and teach different subjects.

*The Overseas Schools.* Demographic information could not be obtained from the overseas schools, although my observations and informal conversations with faculty in these schools lead me to conclude that they are similar in many ways to the U. S. schools, although with a few notable differences. The teachers in the overseas schools were 100% male, all over 40 years of age, and had all taught for a minimum of 10 years. The ethnic makeup of students and teachers in the

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<sup>8</sup> The longest for more than 30 years; the youngest for 15 years.

Australian, New Zealand, German and Polish schools was almost 100% white; the students and teachers in the Korean schools were 100% Korean.

With no exceptions, the atmosphere in all of the overseas schools was similar. I continually was struck by the seriousness of purpose that seemed to permeate the atmosphere in these schools. Students were sitting on the floor outside of their classrooms reading their textbooks. The movement of students between classes when the periods changed was very orderly. The halls, the classrooms, the restrooms were clean. There was very little paper or waste in the courtyards, the halls, or the classrooms.. All of the schools were very clean. Classrooms were (very) quiet. Libraries were full. Students were paying attention to their teachers. Teachers were teaching and students were learning.

Classes in all of the overseas schools were heterogeneous (the students were of mixed ability). The ethnic composition of the students was very homogenous; the gender of students in all but the Korean schools was about 50 percent male; 50 percent female. The Korean students were separated by gender. The style of the teachers was predominantly lecture, although several instances of classroom discussion were observed. The classes met at different times during the day. The teachers generally had the same instructional objectives, and used the same textbooks, but had different sorts and amounts of supplementary materials available, gave different types and amounts of homework (all of the teachers in the overseas schools gave homework), engaged students in different kinds of activities (although not as many as did the teachers in the U. S. schools), and taught different subjects.

Are Different Kinds of Students and Subjects Taught Differently?

What I am most interested in determining is whether teachers who are judged effective,<sup>9</sup> yet who teach students of different abilities and/or different subjects, teach social studies differently. I now believe they do not, at least not in ways that matter. The social studies teachers in the schools I have observed do (to some degree) teach differently, but the differences are more a matter of style than of substance. Effective teachers do teach their classes on occasion in different ways, but overall, they behave and teach in remarkably similar ways, regardless of school, subject, or the ability level of their students.

What are some of these ways? Effective teachers often engage students in discussions rather than just lecturing;<sup>10</sup> they often ask students questions rather than having them recite; they often work with students in small groups (and even place them in dyads) rather than as an entire class; they often ask students to respond to each other instead of to the teacher; and on almost a regular basis, they require students to be active rather than passive learners (e.g., by engaging them in activities such as role playing, small group work, asking them to solve a problem; giving a presentation; and so forth). In short, they make a point to engage students in activities that help them<sup>11</sup> to understand and require them to use the information and ideas they acquire rather than just to remember them. Effective teachers appear to like what they are doing. They like their students, they like their subject, and they like to teach.

<sup>9</sup> I realize that what constitutes an "effective" teacher is open to debate; however, I would wager that most teachers would agree with me that the evidence mentioned in footnote #2 would indicate that an effective teacher is present.

<sup>10</sup> It is not that effective teachers do not lecture, for they do. It is the manner in which they lecture that differs--almost always, they combine their lectures with pictures, maps, and/or other visuals. Even in the overseas schools, where lectures are far more predominant than in the U. S. schools, the teachers interspersed their talks with questions, requests for examples, illustrations, and so forth.

<sup>11</sup> In both my judgment and that of their students.

Ineffective teachers, on the other hand, are more likely to present ideas ready-made to students rather than asking them to develop ideas for themselves. They are more likely to talk to students than with them; to maintain a somewhat disorderly classroom with lots of noise and confusion rather than an orderly one where students can concentrate; they are less likely to demand that students pay attention, or to wake up sleeping students. They are more likely to have discipline problems, and less likely to resolve those problems quickly and appropriately. They are less likely to have a clear-cut sense of where they are heading. They are more likely to engage students in busywork, to stress the memorization and regurgitation of facts rather than the understanding of ideas. Students are rarely active learners in their classes. These teachers do not appear to like what they are doing; often they do not seem to like their students, and rarely do they seem to be having any fun.

I have witnessed some remarkable teaching in every country in every school in which I observed. But neither the ability level of the class, the subject taught, the ethnicity of the students, nor the gender and ethnicity of the teacher seem to be a distinguishing characteristic that differentiates the effective from the ineffective. Good teaching appears to be remarkably similar no matter where it occurs.

This fact--that good teaching appears to transcend the ability level of students or the subject matter taught--surprised me. I intuitively thought that ability level would certainly make a difference in the ways a teacher would relate to students. Similarly, I thought that a subject like economics would certainly be taught differently than a subject like cultural geography. But such does not appear to be the case, at least not in the classes I have observed so far. In the remainder of the paper, therefore, I wish to describe some of the most notable behaviors and characteristics that I now believe effective teachers possess that ineffective teachers lack.

### Behaviors and Characteristics of Effective Social Studies Teachers

Effective social studies teachers do certain things (or do these things to a greater extent), and they possess certain characteristics that ineffective teachers do not. They behave in remarkably similar ways, regardless of students, subjects, or schools. As a check against subconscious bias on my part, I have applied triangulation analysis by classifying each behavior or characteristic by data source (O=observation; I=interview; and S=student interview). All of the behaviors and characteristics listed have been identified by at least two sources, either through independent verification (that is, the behavior or characteristic was observed prior to being mentioned in an interview, or was mentioned in an interview without any direct prompting or questioning by me); or through dependent identification (by identifying the behavior or characteristic either by direct questioning in an interview or through observing the behavior or characteristic after it was mentioned in an interview).

Some of the most salient of the characteristics and behaviors of effective teachers are the following:

- They all have high (sometimes extremely high) expectations for their students--(I,S). Effective teachers let their students know in no uncertain words that they always can do better. They keep pushing them to try harder, to go a little bit further, to "go for the gold," and not to settle for less than their very best. Here are the remarks of Robert Townsend<sup>12</sup>, a 45-year-old black male who has been teaching social studies for more than 20 years. He told me that he has taught "every kind of social studies course there is." I observed him teaching an eleventh-grade class in United States history. I asked him what expectations he had for his students:

*I want them to do well in life. Nobody can guarantee this, of course, but I try to stress that information is important for them to acquire. They*

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<sup>12</sup> The names of the students and teachers in this paper are not their real names.

*don't all buy this, of course, but I keep pushing it. The important thing is that they know I expect them to work hard in my course. I give homework pretty regularly, but I do my best to make it make sense to them. I always try to explain how what I am talking about ties in with their world and their lives. I want my students to be able to make sense out of the world in which they live. The world is a pretty scary place for an adolescent, you know, and I want to help them come to grips, so far as I can, with what they do not understand.*

• They all stress depth rather than coverage-(O,I,S). Effective teachers continually try to relate facts together, to help their students grasp an underlying idea rather than asking them to acquire facts without connecting them in some way. Read the comments of Alice Tom, a 50-year-old Asian female. She has been teaching social studies for 17 years. She says she "loves history." I observed her teaching an eleventh grade honors class in twentieth century world history. I asked her what she tried to stress in her classes.

*I think you have to deal with a period or a topic in detail, in depth. Not just cover it. What is important is to see how the events that have occurred connect, or at least to try and see if they do. How do they tie together? I think ideas are more important than facts. Oh, facts are important, you have to know some facts, but I am most interested in helping them look for how facts connect. I teach concepts--you know, like cooperation. Like how the colonists cooperated to help defeat the British in the Revolutionary War, and that the important thing to think about is when and why cooperation is effective. Then I ask them to look for examples in their own lives--in the newspapers, at school--of cooperation. We've studied the Revolutionary War but when we study the Civil War, I will want them to try to identify examples of*

*cooperation that occurred then. The important thing is to help students get at this concept in depth, and to do that you have got to look at a lot of examples. Well, two or three anyway (laughs).*

The students picked this up, too. Here is what one student had to say about Ms. Tom:

*Ms. Tom is terrific. I like her a lot. She doesn't just teach us facts, you know. She kind of shows you how they go together. She has us do exercises where we put things together, you know, and then try to label them?<sup>13</sup> She is always asking us how this relates to that. It is hard, but a lot better than what I had in social studies last year.*

Contrast that with the following comments by an ineffective teacher:

*I am tired of all this stuff about concepts. Students need information, and that means facts. We have a lot of ignoramuses walking around this world, and I do not intend to contribute to producing any more of them. I want to fill my kids up with facts. There is so much they need to know, and the schools don't have much time to waste. Nothing turns me off faster than some wise-guy student trying to argue with me over something he knows nothing about.*

- They all are able to explain things clearly to their students--(O.S.) Effective teachers explain the ideas they are trying to teach in language that their students can understand. They are able to clarify what they are trying to say with examples that make sense to students. This is very important--they use lots of examples that relate to their students' lives. Although some of these teachers are primarily lecturers, they intersperse their lectures with questions to the class that ask about points in their reading or for an example of something related to what the class is studying. They use frequent examples and try to relate events from the past to what is

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<sup>13</sup> A reference to the concept formation strategy initially pioneered by Hilda Taba.

happening today. Here is what one student had to say about one such teacher (in Australia):

*She makes it (history) make sense. I understand what she tells us, and if we don't get what is in the book, she can explain it to us so that we get it, you know.*

Contrast the above remark with the following, expressed by another student in the United States about a teacher she judged ineffective:

*Half of the time I don't understand what in the hell he is talking about. He talks about all of this stuff that makes no sense to me and whenever I ask him a question, he gives me a bunch of gobbledegook that makes no sense. I don't like civics and I don't like this class cause most of the stuff we are supposed to learn is just dumb--I don't see how it affects me, and Mr. Johnson can't tell me.*

• They all are good listeners--(O,S). When students talk, effective teachers listen. They listen to what the students have to say and try to respond appropriately. They have good wait time. They not only encourage their students to talk, but they convey to them that they want to hear what the students have to say, and they are willing to wait for a sufficient time to allow them to say it. Here is what one student had to say in this regard about a teacher in New Zealand:

*You know what I like most about Mrs. McNaughton? She listens to you--she shows you respect. She knows your name and recognizes you in the halls, and always says hello, and is willing to listen to your problems and to stuff, even if it is not about geography.*

• They all demonstrate remarkable patience--(O,I,S). This is evidenced by the willingness of the effective teachers to explain things over and over again when students do not understand. I commented about this to Larry Donner, a 55-year-old, Caucasian male who said he has been teaching social studies for 30 years and who

had "loved every minute of it." I observed him teaching a twelfth grade economics class. When I commented on how extremely patient I thought he was, he replied:

*Well, you can't explain things to them if you don't know what they don't understand, and you've got to find out. I learned a long time ago that just plain waiting, sometimes even for a couple of minutes, without saying anything, often would open some kids up. If they know that you want to hear what they have to say, and are willing to wait for them to get it out, they eventually will get it out. Did you notice how I often say, "Come on, now let me hear ya?" Well that works, not for all, of course, but for a lot of them.*

•They all vary the kinds of things they do and the kinds of activities in which they engage students in class--(O,L,S). It should be noted here that it is not the fact that the more ineffective teachers never use some of the techniques or activities used by the effective teachers. It was the fact that they do not use them very much. It seems also to be the case that an activity can be used too much. Ineffective teachers use films, for example, too often, as the following comment from a student reveals:

*All we do in history is watch movies. I like movies, but some of them we see in class have nothing that I can see to do with what we are studying. We have a movie a week, sometimes twice. Course I don't mind too much cause the class is so boring and you can at least sleep while the movie is on.*

Compare the above remark with one from this by another student about an effective teacher:

*He doesn't just go by the book. He gives you lots of examples from real life; he brings in his slides and pictures that he has taken all over the world; We see films and filmstrips, and hear records about the times,*

*about the music and what people were saying, and play games, and work in groups, do case comparisons--all kinds of stuff. I didn't ever like history, but I do now. Mr. Abercrombie is the kind of teacher whose classes you want to take again and again. He knows an awful lot, and he makes it fascinating.*

Table Two presents a summary of how frequently various types of activities occur in the classrooms of effective and non-effective teachers:

*end  
w/Henry*

**TABLE TWO**  
**FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF VARIOUS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**  
**IN THE CLASSROOMS OF EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE**  
**SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS**

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Effective Teachers</u>	<u>Ineffective Teachers</u>
Teacher lecture	Occasionally	Frequently
Discussions led by teacher	Frequently	Rarely
Films	Occasionally	Frequently
Filmstrips	Occasionally	Rarely
Slides	Occasionally	Never
Use of transparencies by teacher	Frequently	Never
Small group work	Frequently	Rarely
Student-led discussions	Frequently	Rarely
Debates	Occasionally	Never
Student presentations	Frequently	Rarely
Silent reading in class	Never	Frequently
Reading from text by students in class	Never	Frequently
Guest speakers	Occasionally	Never
Dittoed worksheets	Never	Frequently
Use of multiple text sources	Occasionally	Never
Field trips	Occasionally	Never

\*Key: Never indicates that I did not see any evidence of this activity during the time I observed these teachers.

Rarely indicates that the activity was observed to occur no more than once a month during the observation period. Occasionally indicates that the activity was observed to occur no more than once every two weeks during the observation period.

Frequently indicates that the activity was observed to occur at least twice a week during the observation period.

•They all possess incredible amounts of energy--(O,I,S). Effective teachers spend a great deal of time preparing the lessons they are to teach.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, they move around their rooms continually (pointing to maps and/or other materials, pulling out dictionaries and other reference materials, etc.). They are almost constantly in motion while class is in session.

•They all display a considerable command of their subject matter and are able to relate it to a variety of daily life examples--(O,I,S). These teachers know their subject, and they can communicate what they know. They also are continually learning, taking classes, participating in conferences, attending workshops and summer institutes, and buying books and materials on their own to keep abreast of new developments in their subject field. All of the ones that I observed had advanced degrees in their subjects. Three students commented about this:

- He knows his subject really well.*
- She knows a lot of stuff about geography, and makes it interesting for you.*
- The man knows what he is talking about!*

•Their students learn--(O,I,S).. Perhaps of most interest and importance, the students of effective teachers (as might be expected) learn a lot. To gain some idea of the knowledge students were acquiring, I calculated the average grade the students in each class received on the quizzes and unit tests, as well as on the oral reports, book reports, notebooks, and/or map assignments (if these were assigned).<sup>15</sup> To gain some idea of their ability to engage in higher-level thinking, I kept a record of the number of times I observed students making statements that involved

<sup>14</sup> One U. S. teacher remarked that he gets to school every morning about 6:15 a.m. (his first class begins at 7:35 a.m.), and that he spends three hours after school, plus most of Saturday, grading papers and preparing for forthcoming classes. Many of the teachers in the overseas schools also came to school very early in the morning and stayed long after classes were over.

<sup>15</sup>I was able to perform these mathematical calculations only for the U. S. schools. For the overseas schools, I had to rely on what the teachers and students told me, which I then checked by examining their grade books and other class records.

something other than merely recalling information they had read or heard in class (e.g., categorizing, summarizing, hypothesizing, comparing and contrasting and/or making warranted generalizations). To gain some idea of student interest, I added up the total number of absences and tardies for each class, and also kept a record of the number of different students participating in the class discussions I witnessed. I also rated the attentiveness of each class to the teacher on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=low; 5=high), and compared my ratings with similar ratings I asked each teacher to make. I also asked students to indicate their liking for both teacher and subject using a similar scale of 1 to 5 (1=low, 5=high).<sup>16</sup> The results are shown in Table Three.

Since I have not, as yet, compared the work of the teachers I have been observing with a comparison group of teachers judged ineffective, I cannot say unequivocably that the activities and behaviors of these teachers caused their students to learn, although I would argue that the evidence acquired provides strong suspicion that this is the case. Further anecdotal evidence is available, however, in that the average grade received by students in the classrooms of these teachers surpassed the average grade received by students in other social studies classes in their schools.<sup>17</sup> Although all of these teachers displayed a number of similar behavior and techniques, they also differed in a number of ways. Let us look now, therefore, at their differences.

#### How Did They Differ?

During my observations, I judged whether various activities (e.g., weekly discussions of current events; student-led discussions; small group work) occurred

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<sup>16</sup>I did this when observing in the overseas schools as well.

<sup>17</sup>It is a fact that many of the students in some of the schools are above average in ability, and that it is possible that some of the behaviors and techniques utilized by these teachers might have to be modified to some extent when working with students in other schools. This statement can be qualified somewhat, however, by the fact that all of the teachers I observed indicated that they had taught at other schools in the past, with less able students, and stated that they taught similarly under those conditions.

**TABLE THREE**  
**EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING**  
(n=number of classes)

	U. S. Schools	Overseas Schools
Evidence of Learning	Average grade (n=24)	Average grade (n=40)
Average grade on quizzes (4 pt. scale)	3.72	3.00 <sup>h</sup>
Average grade on unit tests (4 pt. scale)	3.6	B <sup>h</sup>
Number of different students participating in class discussions <sup>a</sup>	14 out of avg of 30: n of discussions=300	9 out of avg of 35: n of discussions=20
Absences <sup>b</sup>	7	11 <sup>g</sup>
Tardies	0	0 <sup>a</sup>
Small group work <sup>c</sup>	100%	na
Oral reports	A	"Good to excellent" <sup>g</sup>
Book reports	B+	"Good to excellent" <sup>g</sup>
Notebooks	B	"Good to excellent" <sup>g</sup>
Map assignments	A	"Good to excellent" <sup>g</sup>
Higher-level thinking <sup>d</sup>	100%	100%
Attentiveness rating by observer(s) <sup>e</sup>	5	5
Attentiveness rating by teacher <sup>f</sup>	5	5
Average rating of course by students (1=low, 5=high)	4.75	"Very good" <sup>g</sup>
Average rating of teacher by students (1=low, 5=high)	4.6	"Very good" <sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Average number of students participating per number of discussions witnessed

<sup>b</sup> Average number of students absent per class per year

<sup>c</sup> Percent of total class participating

<sup>d</sup> Total number of instances observed by myself/ total number observed by my colleague, Professor Wallen over one year period

<sup>e</sup> 100 per cent agreement by the two observers, using a scale of 1-5 (1=low, 5=high)

<sup>f</sup> Teachers were asked, "In general, how would you rate the attentiveness of your class on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high?"

<sup>g</sup> Based on comments with teachers and/or students in informal conversations.

<sup>h</sup> Based on examination of teachers grade books; substantiated through interviews with students

in each teacher's classroom over the course of the semester *frequently* (at least twice a week), *occasionally* (no more than once every two weeks), *rarely* (no more than once a month), or *never* (did not occur at all). Table Four presents a summary of these judgments. I also asked students how frequently each of these activities occurred, using the same four categories (frequently, occasionally, rarely, never). The students and I were in 100 per cent agreement with regard to the "never" category, and reached 90 percent, 85 and 90 percent agreement respectively with regard to the "rarely," "frequently" and "occasionally" categories.

Table Four reveals that a considerable variety of activities occurred in these teachers' classrooms, although no particular activity tended to predominate for any of the four.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, for those activities which were described as occurring occasionally or frequently, students were asked to rate the quality of the activity. Table Five reveals that all such activities received a mean rating of 3.0 or better on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Student interviews revealed, however, that even when students gave a specific activity a relatively low rating (i.e., a rating of 3.0), they did not consider this a particularly low rating in any absolute sense, but only in comparison to the other activities they were experiencing in class.

I also asked the students in each class to rank order the classroom activities from most-liked to least-liked. These ratings are shown in Table Six.

What needs to be stressed, however, is that these teachers cannot be pigeonholed into neat and narrow categories. Although they tended to prefer a particular teaching style, they cannot be classified as *just* lecturers or questioners or small-group advocates, but rather more or less eclectics who, when necessary, diverged from their normal routine when they believed an alternate activity was necessary to accomplish one or more objectives they had in mind.

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<sup>18</sup> This was supported by the classroom observations.

**TABLE FOUR  
HOW FREQUENTLY VARIOUS CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES  
OCCURRED\***

Activity	U.S. Schools	Overseas Schools
Teacher lecture	Occasionally	Frequently
Discussions led by teacher	Frequently	Occasionally
Films	Occasionally	Occasionally
Filmstrips	Frequently	Rarely
Slides	Frequently	Never
Use of transparencies by teacher	Frequently	Rarely
Small group work	Frequently	Occasionally
Student-led discussions	Frequently	Rarely
Debates	Occasionally	Never
Student presentations	Occasionally	Occasionally
Silent reading in class	Never	Rarely
Reading from text by students in class	Never	Occasionally
Guest speakers	Occasionally	Occasionally
Dittoed worksheets	Never	Frequently

\*Key: Never indicates that I did not see any evidence of this activity during the time I observed these teachers. Rarely indicates that the activity was observed to occur no more than once a month during the observation period. Occasionally indicates that the activity was observed to occur no more than once every two weeks during the period we observed. Frequently indicates that the activity was observed to occur at least once per week during the period we observed.

**TABLE FIVE  
STUDENT RATINGS OF TYPICAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (MEANS)**

Activity	U. S. Schools	Overseas Schools
Lectures by instructor	4.00	4.27
Discussions led by instructor	4.50	4.17
Films	4.00	4.00
Filmstrips	3.85	4.27
Slides	4.25	4.20
Use of transparencies by instructor	3.80	4.00
Small group work	4.50	4.40
Student-led discussions	3.75	3.75
Debates	4.00	4.00
Student presentations	3.60	3.60
Silent reading in class	na	3.00
Reading from text by students in class	na	3.00
Guest speakers	4.80	4.80
Dittoed worksheets	na	3.50

A related point to emphasize is that, although these teachers varied in both ability and how they were perceived by both students and myself, they each utilized several similar, even identical techniques, and displayed several behaviors

**TABLE SIX**  
**RANK ORDERING OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**  
(1=highest rating)

Activity	U. S. Schools	Overseas Schools
Lectures by instructor	5	6 (tie)
Discussions led by instructor	4 (tie)	2
Films	4 (tie)	1
Filmstrips	8 (tie)	14
Slides	8 (tie)	8
Use of transparencies by instructor	9	6 (tie)
Small group work	1	7
Student-led discussions	6	9
Debates	11	10
Student presentations	10	4
Silent reading in class	na	12
Reading from text by students in class	na	11
Guest speakers	2	3
Dittoed worksheets <sup>19</sup>	na	13

that were observed to have (and which students identified as having) a positive effect in the classroom--that is, that were perceived by both students and myself as helping students learn the subject matter and keeping them interested in what was being taught. Many of the techniques were also identified by the teachers themselves during their interviews as "things they did that they thought contributed to student learning." These behaviors and techniques are described briefly below.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Although I did not witness any use of dittoed worksheets by these teachers in the U. S. schools, I asked the students how they would rate them. Almost without exception, they rated them lower than any of the other activities listed. Typical comments by students included "ugh!" "Ick!" and "Save us, please, from any worksheets!"

<sup>20</sup> Triangulation analysis was applied by classifying each behavior or technique by data source (observation=O, teacher interview=I, and student interview=S). The letters immediately following the introductory sentence to each behavior or technique indicate which data source *independently* identified them. "Independently" means that the behavior or technique was mentioned in an interview without direct questioning by the investigator(s), or it was observed prior to being mentioned in an interview. For example, the third technique (designing in-class activities that require active involvement) was identified independently through both observation and in a teacher interview. Additional verification was obtained through dependent identification, that is, by identifying the

Frequently Used Techniques or Displayed Behaviors of Effective Teachers

I now believe that I have sufficient data to offer some tentative hypotheses about how effective teachers behave. Although they may not display all of the behaviors and/or techniques mentioned below, they will display more of them (and those they do display, they will display more consistently) than ineffective teachers.

(O,I)•At the beginning of the semester, they state that it was up to each student to determine how well they will do in the class. They must take personal responsibility.

(O,S)•They make themselves available on a one-to-one basis, both during and after class meetings, for discussion of personal concerns and questions

(O,I,S)•They design in-class activities that require active involvement and interaction of students with each other.

(O,I,S)•They express interest in what is being learned.

(O, I, S)•They frequently draw analogies between what is being discussed or has been read and current events.

(O,I,S)•They make frequent use of humor, sometimes by telling personal anecdotes, often in talking about their personal life.

(O,I)•They encourage students, at an early class meeting, to form small support groups (n=4 or 5) and exchange telephone numbers so that they can have a partner they can call on a regular basis if they need to discuss questions they have about an assignment.

(O,S)•They repeatedly encourage students to continue asking for explanations until they understand what is being explained or discussed. They repeat

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behavior or technique either by direct questioning in interview or through observing the behavior or technique after it had been identified in an interview. All behaviors and techniques were identified independently or non-independently by at least two data sources.

explanations and illustrations several times and, usually, are willing to wait while students re-formulate their questions and/or statements.

(O)•They make a point of waiting for a student response, telling students to remind them if they don't wait long enough.

(O,I,S)•They emphasize thinking rather than merely restating statements from the textbook.

(O,I)•They ask students to look for patterns and relationships in what they read (e.g., "How might the actions of the United States just prior to the Spanish-American War be another example of self-interest?").

(O)•They frequently tell students when to take notes, and when just to listen.

(O,I,S)•They make use of "tailor-made" materials (e.g., slides) in addition to the textbook.

(O,I,S)•They relate subject matter to personal experience (e.g., stock fluctuations in today's market when talking about the Great Crash of 1929).

(I,S)•Their grading policy is clear from the outset.

(O,S)•During an early class meeting, they describe some of their interests and what they hope students will learn from the class as a way of making students feel comfortable and relaxed.

(O,I,S)•They ask questions that require students to think about what they are reading.

(O)•When they make a mistake, they publicly admit it.

(O,I,S)•They use, whenever possible, examples from current events to illustrate historical concepts.

(O,I,S)•They use a variety of modalities (visual, spatial, verbal) in trying to explain the subject matter.

(O,I)•They arrange students into small groups, and then frequently rearrange them so as to encourage wider student interaction.

(O,S)•They learn the first names of students quickly, in order to foster informality and to facilitate calling on them in class .

(O,I,S)•They deliberately call on reticent students to foster attention and class participation.

(O,I,S)•They ask questions frequently to check understanding .

(O,I,S)•They do not let small group work go on too long.

(O)•They smile a lot.

(O,I)•They deliberately make eye contact to establish personal connections.

The above is a listing of several behaviors and techniques that these teachers, both in the United States and abroad, used in the course of their daily teaching. Not all of these techniques, of course, were employed every day, nor were all of them employed by every teacher I observed. Nevertheless, they suggest some of the things that effective teachers do to help their students learn, and offer possibilities for novices to try to see if they can increase their effectiveness.

Effective teachers display many similarities, therefore, which contribute to student learning. Each was observed, on several occasions, to do certain things that, in my opinion, contributed to student learning and to the maintenance of a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. They:

- try to get to know their students as individuals (learn their names, their interests, etc.);

- vary the learning activities in which they engage students in order to fit differing student' interests and abilities;

- create a relaxed, but task-oriented, classroom (smile a lot, dress casually, etc., yet do not tolerate fooling around);

- talk about their personal interests, biases, and opinions to students on occasion;

- demonstrate a considerable enthusiasm for teaching. All appeared visibly enthusiastic about some aspects of the subject matter almost every day. This was often indicated through an occasional remark such as "Isn't that interesting," or "Well, what do you know about that!";
- state repeatedly that the subject matter of the course is important and that students will like and be able to learn it;
- tell a joke (often a very corny one);
- listen attentively to student comments, answers, and questions;
- pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal cues from students;
- give prompt feedback (answer questions quickly, provide additional examples, etc.);
- assign homework two or three times per week;
- ask questions to make students think (i.e., that require students to do something more than just recall information);
- relate course content to daily happenings as reported in the media.
- give many examples to illustrate a point, an idea, or a concept.
- use a variety of modes of presentation, including verbal and written diagrams and schematics.

### Implications

The information collected to date with regard to the social studies teachers I have observed (with respect both to their overall teaching style and the specific techniques they use, and the behaviors they display in the course of their daily teaching) tends to validate some of the perceptions of other observers concerning the behaviors that distinguish effective from ineffective teachers at the high school level (e.g., see Berliner, 1985). On the other hand, some of my findings raise issues that have not commonly been considered in the continuing dialogue concerning effective teaching.

It is hardly surprising that effective teachers have classes that are business-like, yet informal. Nor that they are friendly and concerned about their students' welfare. Nor that they are good at presenting information clearly to students and explaining that which students do not understand. Nor that they provide frequent and conscientious feedback on student work, and work hard at maintaining an instructional pace appropriate to their students. Nor that they design materials appropriate to the ability level of their students and that they are perceived as fair. Some of the specific techniques they use to achieve these conditions have, for years, been recommended by the writers of social studies methods books (Armstrong, 1980; Banks, 1991; Ehman, et al, 1974; Fraenkel, 1980). They include telling students they can succeed; asking students questions about the reading material; engaging students in discussion; giving examples from daily life; waiting a sufficient time for students to respond; modeling behaviors desired in students; varying the activities in which students are asked to participate in class; using humor to make students feel at ease; and using a variety of sensory modalities in presentations.

Two additional findings seem worthy of note. All of the teachers I observed had instructional goals that went considerably beyond the learning of subject matter alone. All saw their course as having an important impact on the lives of their students--by helping them to develop both intellectual and emotional skills applicable to their lives and by expanding their "world view."

Second, these teachers expressed interest not only in the content of their course, but also in the learning processes of their students. It seems likely that this interest was important in helping them maintain their enthusiasm for teaching.

McNeil (1988) has identified a number of defensive teaching strategies that teachers sometimes use to maintain order in their classroom and ensure that they control what goes on. They include the fragmentation of knowledge (teaching by means of lists of facts rather than emphasizing concepts and ideas); tending to

mystify information (indicating that students should learn about a particular topic, yet not discussing it with them in depth, thereby often shrouding it in mystery); omission (omitting altogether the discussion of controversial topics); and simplification (assuring students that what they were giving them to learn would not be difficult) (pp. 434-437).

To their credit, not one of the teachers I observed, neither in the U. S. nor abroad, used any of these strategies. They tried to discuss concepts and ideas rather than stressing isolated facts; they presented information in depth; they did not shrink from discussing controversial issues when they arose; and they stressed that much of what was to be learned might at times be difficult (although they also stressed that the students could learn it and it would be interesting).

Each of these teachers, in their own way, represent a partial picture of what a number of effective social studies teachers do on a more-or-less daily basis in their classrooms. This is not to say that what they do is what all should do. It is to say that much of what they do is worthy of consideration by those who wish to improve their classroom effectiveness.

What impressed me is that all of the effective teachers I observed operated remarkably similarly regardless of the type of students or the subject matter they taught. Over and over again, I observed similar teacher behaviors and characteristics, and heard students in their interviews identify them. These are listed in Table Seven).

**TABLE SEVEN  
CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIORS  
OF EFFECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS**

- A sense of humor
- Ability to explain ideas clearly
- Fairness
- Asks questions frequently
- Exams require high-level thinking
- Looks for connections between facts
- Encourages all students to participate
  - Tells students they can do better
  - Uses variety of methodologies
- Tailors work to different ability levels
  - Maintains orderly classroom
  - Maintains quiet classroom
- Friendly, but firm (not a "buddy")
  - Energy
  - Thoughtfulness
  - Goal oriented
- Knowledgeable re: subject matter

Here is how one teacher (in Germany) summarized what for him is the essence of good teaching:

*A good teacher is one who is fair, who knows something, who has something to say, but who also knows that you can't teach everything you know. You've also got to have a sense of humor, to be able to laugh at yourself and with these kids; not to take yourself too seriously; but teach them something. And run a fairly tight ship. Now, don't get me wrong. I don't mean to be an autocrat. But you do need to maintain order, to set up an atmosphere that enables students to learn. And you have to help them face up to the fact that there is a lot they don't know, to help them know what they don't know.*

### Conclusion

None of what I have said is probably surprising in that most of the information collected on these teachers tends to validate some of the commonly held perceptions of what constitutes effective teaching. It is not surprising that effective teachers have a sense of humor, or can explain ideas clearly, or encourage

their students to participate, or maintain an orderly classroom, or are fair in their dealings with students, or that they display any of the other characteristics and behaviors listed in Table Seven. Most of us would probably be surprised if this were not the case. On the other hand, some of my findings raise issues that are not commonly considered in the dialogue on effective teaching. Five of these in particular deserve a further word or two because they describe characteristics or require skills not normally sought after or taught in teacher training programs.

First is the extent to which effective teachers encourage students to take public risks by discussing their mistakes and/or confusion with their classmates. Some of the effective teachers go even further by encouraging students to publicly acknowledge not only their confusion, but the anxieties they hold related to their mistakes or misunderstandings. One even required that her students restate self-deprecating statements they made into more positive remarks (e.g., changing a statement such as "I'm just stupid, I guess," to "I don't know, I'm confused, but I am an intelligent person, so I have to rethink this"). Effective teachers try to learn something about the background of their students so that they can tailor their work requests and assignments accordingly.

Second, effective teachers are willing to establish personal contact with their students. They deliberately seek eye contact, learn their students' names early in the semester, discuss their own life experiences and relate anecdotes about their own lives, bring in pictures of their families, tell jokes on occasion, and let students know that they are available for one-to-one interviews. All frequently share their personal views and feelings about topics and issues with students.

Third, effective teachers place considerable emphasis on bringing to light the thought processes engaged in by students, not only by emphasizing the importance of product (i.e., trying to find out as much as one can about the world in which one lives), but also by stressing the importance of process, that is, how one thinks (e.g.,

"Are you asking yourself what is the main point of the author's argument?"'). Effective teachers continually encourage students to explore their own thought processes, in effect, "to think about how they think about things."

Fourth, effective teachers consciously arrange for frequent social interaction among students through small group assignments that require a cooperative effort. Many that I observed have on-going discussion groups to which students are assigned and with which they work on a regular basis. Several change the composition of the groups frequently to broaden the circle of acquaintances with which students interact. Almost all commented in my interviews with them that they view social interaction as a main goal of instruction.

Lastly, effective teachers quickly and deliberately attend to non-verbal cues as indicators of confusion and/or anxiety, and react accordingly by providing further or different explanations, alternative assignments, and so forth.

Some of these characteristics or behaviors require skills and abilities not normally expected of high school teachers. Encouraging students to take public risks requires a teacher experienced in handling potentially awkward situations. Helping students explore their thinking processes requires a skill that cannot be acquired without experience, practice, and probably training. Realizing that one can teach too much requires a sense of what is essential, along with the ability to refrain from telling all one knows about a topic. Going out of one's way to establish personal contact with students requires a willingness to do so. Teaching students to look for relationships and connections requires a style that many teachers have not previously been exposed to, and for which few models can be found.

Similar behaviors and characteristics were observed in social studies classrooms in six different countries. This provides considerable food for thought. Should my findings be borne out by subsequent research with many more social studies classes, in other schools and in other countries, this would seem to have

considerable import for social studies education. If good teaching does indeed transcend schools, subjects, and students and if, indeed, there are a certain set of core behaviors, characteristics, skills, and abilities that effective teachers possess, we need to concentrate on ways of helping teachers in training (not to mention those already in the profession who wish to improve their performance) acquire these characteristics, behaviors skills, and abilities. On the one hand, this may well require us to change how we train future teachers or on the other hand, it may even require us to be far more careful about who we encourage to become teachers in the first place. Not everyone, it now seems apparent, can teach effectively. We should help those who have the potential to do so.

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